CELESTE EXPRESS

THE WAR OF THE WURMS



ALEXANDER SLATER

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For Lelly. My sun, my moon and my whole universe.

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GALAXANDRIA
CASTLE TOWN
E.O.M.A.
GALAXANDRIA
World Map
YOU ARE
HERE


ASTEROID FIELDS
THE ROYAL PALACE
THE INTERGALACTIC
POST OFFICE





The Kingdom in the Stars

Far, far away, deep in the nothing of space, was the cosmic realm of Galaxandria. This odd star-shaped world was made up of lots and lots of microplanets and asteroids spinning slowly, like a galaxy, round a central white sun. So small were some of these planets that you could have dinner on one and hop over to the next for your pudding.

At the heart of this world, with its own planet and garden moons, was the Galaxandria Royal Palace, a shimmering castle of astral beauty. But its quiet morning orbit was disrupted by its most unruly resident.

'IT'S NOT FAIR!' screamed Princess Celeste



Starwing, huffing down the long palace hallway, her golden star-shaped hair bouncing as she marched. In all her 963 years, she'd never experienced such blatant favouritism.

Celeste wasn't actually 963. The Royal Palace orbited the central sun much faster than the rest of Galaxandria, so a year in the palace was technically only a few days long. Celeste was more than happy to embrace extreme old age if it meant she got a hundred birthdays a year instead of one.

Today was not one of her birthdays (that was yesterday). But it was her older brother Percy's actual fifteenth birthday and news had reached Celeste that their father, King Leonis Starwing VI, was throwing the prince the largest birthday bash this side of the cosmos.

The king and Prince Percy were enjoying their morning reading of the *Terrestrial Times* when Celeste stormed into the breakfast dining hall.

'I've just walked past an entire spaceship's worth



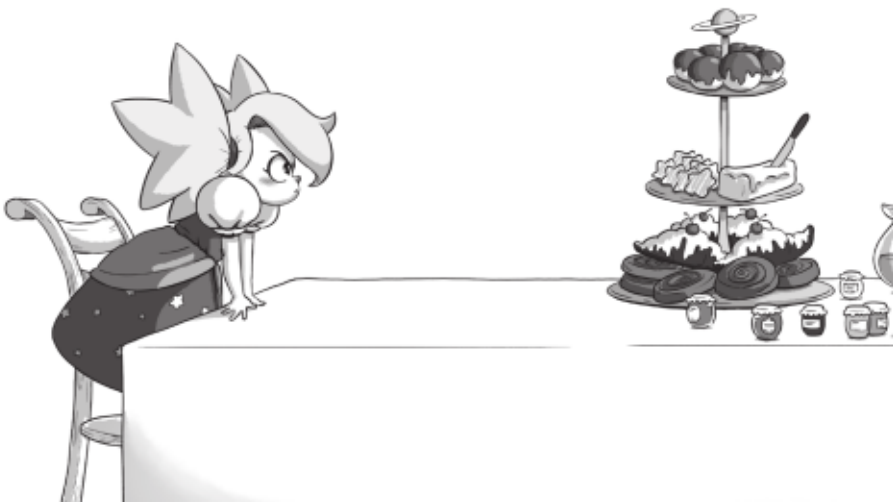
of party decorators and enough caterers to feed the whole universe!' she said, stamping her foot.

The king paused a moment, sipping tea through the perfectly symmetrical star-shaped beard that hugged his stern face. Despite being in his dressing gown, he still commanded regal power, as if he were currently seated on the Cosmic Throne.

'And what is your point, Celeste?' He was unamused.

'My point is you didn't make this much effort when it was my birthday yesterday!'

The king sighed. This was a conversation he'd had with Celeste several times. He loved his daughter, which is why he allowed her to have so many



birthdays to begin with, but she was getting bossier every day.

Celeste continued. 'All I had for my nine hundred and sixty-third birthday was a rubbish party and a two-tier cake and a dozen presents and a sad clown and —'

'Honey, if you counted your birthdays once a year instead of twice a week, they would be much greater celebrations.' The king took another sip of tea. 'Why was the clown sad?'

'Probably because he was sick of singing "Happy Birthday, Celeste",' Prince Percy joked. Celeste shot him a sharp glare. The prince was a slim young lad, who had yet to grow any star-shaped facial hair, but it was just as well, because he would have hated to



get any of his Orbit-O frosted cereal flakes stuck in it. 'You'd enjoy your birthdays more if you had some friends to invite.' He smirked.

That one stung Celeste.

'Perseus . . .' his father said warningly, using Percy's full name to show he was being serious.

Suddenly, a loud chime echoed across the room, interrupting them.

On a tall stand near the back wall was a large glass ball with a swirling green vortex inside. It was pulsing with a bright glow and continued its noise until one of the butlers walked over to it.



Celeste could see that a series of bright words was now displayed in the glass. The butler started to read.

'A new message on the Wurm, sire. The lord and lady of the Meow-ky Way have accepted their invitation to tonight's party!'

'Excellent!' the king replied cheerfully, standing

to take his leave. 'Do make sure there are enough flying milk saucers for them.'

Nobody understood exactly how these magical Wurm spheres worked. All people knew was that if you wrote a message on the glass, along with who you wanted it to go to, the words travelled through the green vortex – **a wormhole**. After a short journey through a magical dimension, the message would appear in the right person's sphere with the glass saying, **'Lunch will be at noon,'** or, **'Please stop inviting me to lunch; I don't know you.'** They really were quite amazing little magical devices and were free to everyone. You could even get news updates, ask them questions and receive weather alerts if a meteor shower was coming.

Celeste ruffled her hair in frustration.

'You have Meow-ky Way cat-people coming to your party, Percy? **This is so unfair!'** she cried, not showing the maturity of a 963-year-old. 'I'm not going!' She felt her father's large shadow

looming over her. 'Well,' she muttered sheepishly, '*you* never come to mine, Percy . . .'

'Nobody has time to attend twice-weekly birthday parties, Celeste,' said the king. Celeste wriggled in her seat, not liking what she was hearing. 'You are going to this party,' the king continued firmly, 'and you will not embarrass this family with your ridiculous tantrums.'

'But not once have you made this much effort for my birthday,' she protested. 'Not even for the proper ones. Percy is getting a Lunar Ball, a Galactic Feast and more guests than I've had birthday cakes!'

The king sighed again and gently put his hand



on her shoulder. 'You can have a birthday party just as spectacular if you stop having them so frequently. Maybe when this 963-year-old girl grows up and accepts she's actually nine.'

The Wurm chimed again, and the butler glanced over to read the latest message.

'Good news, Your Majesty! The young wizard and owner of the Wurms himself, Herman von Wurmon the Third, has accepted his invitation and he says he will be bringing a special surprise!'

Celeste sat quietly, in a glum mood, as the Wurm continued to receive party responses and well-wishes for her brother for the rest of the morning.

